

The Switch

by Kittenmommy

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Summary: PadmÃ© and SabÃ© make a bet on whether each can convincingly pretend to be the other.

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STANDARD DISCLAIMER: The characters belong to George Lucas. The idea is mine and he can't have it, so THERE (not that he'd want it anyway).

"Well, I think that went VERY well, don't you?" SabÃ© asked. PadmÃ©, dressed as a handmaiden and following a respectful step behind "the Queen," caught up with her and gave her a smile.

"Sometimes I think you do a better job of being me than I do," she joked.

"You are certainly a more patient handmaiden than I," SabÃ© admitted as they continued through the halls of their hotel. They were visiting Coruscant to negotiate a trade agreement with representatives from Dantooine. "I am afraid I frequently lose my temper and shout at the others." RabÃ© said something under her breath, which SabÃ© chose to ignore. When they reached the Queen's suite, PadmÃ© dismissed the other handmaidens.

"I will see to Her Majesty's gown," she said ironically. The handmaidens bowed to her and filed out of the room in silence.

"I just had a thought," SabÃ© said as PadmÃ© unfastened the elaborate closure on the back of SabÃ©'s gown. "I may be good at being you around people like those ambassadors we met with today â€“ people who don't really know you. I wonder if I could fool someone who knows you well. Now that would be the mark of a good decoy."

"I wonder if you could fool Anakin," PadmÃ© mused. "It would be tough. I doubt I could pretend to be YOU convincingly."

"I don't look much like you without the white make-up," SabÃ© noted. "It's the make-up, the clothes, the accent, and the attitude that do it more than anything else. So if you were dressed as the Queen, but acted like meâ€¦ well, you might be able to pull it off." They looked at each other.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" PadmÃ© asked. SabÃ© grinned.

"Probably."

Two hours later, two virtually identical Queens of the Naboo stood in the Queen's suite. Both wore elaborately braided hairstyles covered with black lace veils. Both wore thick, concealing white make-up. Both wore identical long black gowns. They surveyed themselves and each other critically in the mirror. They smiled virtually identical smiles of approval.

"Shall we make a bet on who will manage to go undiscovered the longest, Your Majesty?" PadmÃ© asked in her normal voice.

"By all means, Your Majesty," SabÃ© replied in the Queen's strangulated Nubian accent. "Is ten credits too rich for your blood?" she joked.

"I think I can manage that amount," PadmÃ© said. She held up her cell voicephone. "Whoever gets discovered first calls the other."

"All right. Let's set them on vibrate, though. That way, if we run into a really major problem, we can call each other."

"Sounds good." PadmÃ© said.

"I am going to win, you know," SabÃ© said quietly.

"Think so?"

"Oh yes. I'm much more used to pretending to be you than you are pretending to be me." PadmÃ© smiled.

"We shall see."

PadmÃ© Amidala, Queen of the Naboo walked into Liam's Lounge, flanked by two of her handmaidens. She scanned the crowd and quickly located Anakin sitting alone at a booth in the very back, a beer glass in his hand and half-empty pitcher of Guinness on the table. As usual, the place was packed, and SabÃ© prepared to fight her way through the crowd. Tonight, however, the crowd parted respectfully to make way for her as she proceeded to the back of the club. I could really get used to this, SabÃ© thought. The royal treatmentâ€¦

"Your Majesty," Anakin said jokingly when she reached the table where he was sitting. He stood and sketched her a slightly ironic bow. She laughed.

"Hello, Anakin," SabÃ© said, sliding into the booth next to him. Her

handmaidens took seats at the next table.

"Aren't you worried that you're a bit overdressed for this place?" he asked. She shrugged.

"My meeting with the ambassadors from Dantooine ran longer than expected, and I did not have time to return to my hotel and change."

"Don't get me wrong," Anakin said. "You add class to this dump." SabÃ© raised her eyebrows.

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?" she asked.

"What do you think?" he asked, leaning over to kiss her lips. She jumped in surprise. "Are you OK?" He sounded concerned.

"Yes, I'm fine," she said, trying out a smile.

"You seem jumpy tonight."

"I guess I'm still nervous from the negotiations this afternoon." Oh my goodness, he's supposed to be my boyfriend, of course he'll want to kiss me! SabÃ© thought. On the heels of that thought came another. Oh my! She giggled, picturing PadmÃ© with HER date for the evening.

"Something funny?" Anakin asked.

"No, just thinking." He put his arm around her and pulled her close. This time, determined to win the bet, she returned his kiss enthusiastically, trying very hard not to picture what PadmÃ©'s face would look like if she could see them. Oh yuck, SabÃ© thought. Someone should tell this child that slobbering all over his date's face while kissing her is neither romantic nor necessary, and that eau de beer is NOT sexy cologne.

"Hello, Your Majesty," Obi-Wan said, sliding into the seat across from them. "You're certainly dressed nicely this evening. You make Anakin and I look like bums."

"You ARE bums," SabÃ© replied. She frowned. "Anakin, you didn't tell me Obi-Wan would be joining us." Anakin gave her a funny look.

"When has he NOT joined us?" he asked. Obi-Wan goes with them on their dates? How strange, SabÃ© thought.

"I guess I don't have to ask what we're doing tonight," she said.

"What do we always do?" Anakin asked. SabÃ© decided to hazard what she figured was probably a pretty safe guess.

"Sit here and drink?"

"Exactly," Anakin beamed.

"Hey, want to order some wings?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Sure," she replied, smiling at him. This won't be so bad,

SabÃ©thought._ At least I don't have to worry about things getting too out of hand with Anakin tonight. Having someone else around kind of kills the romance. _She smiled to herself. _Something tells me that before the evening is out, PadmÃ© will be wishing that she had a chaperone too._

How strange it was to be garbed and made up as the Queen, but to be alone. Usually a retinue of handmaidens followed PadmÃ© everywhere when she was acting as Queen. But tonight, she reminded herself, she was not acting as the Queen. She was pretending to be SabÃ© pretending to be her. She shook her head. _This is confusing_, she thought. _I'm really going to have to be on the ball tonight!_ She rang the buzzer. A moment later, the door slid open.

"Good heavens," Palpatine exclaimed, looking her up and down. PadmÃ© smiled.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" she asked. "We DO have a date tonight, don't we?"

"Of course," he said, ushering her inside.

"Sorry about my attire," she apologized. "The meeting ran a bit late and I didn't have time to go back to the hotel and change."

"Well, it's probably for the best that we'll be eating in this evening. If I were to take you out dressed like that, there might be the sort of misunderstandings that lead to talk." He put his arms around her and pulled her close. "But we don't have to worry about that here." _Uh oh,_ PadmÃ© thought. Determined to win the bet, she closed her eyes and tipped her face up to be kissed. To her surprise, his lips barely touched hers. She opened her eyes and looked up at him. _How would SabÃ© react to getting a kiss like that?_ She narrowed her eyes.

"That was a pretty lame kiss," she said archly.

"Well, I know how upset you get when someone kisses the Queen and ruins her make-up after you've spent hours putting it on her," he said. "I would hate to incur the wrath of the handmaiden who put this make-up on you." She smiled.

"How considerate of you - " Yikes, she thought. _I almost called him "Chancellor"! This is going to be tougher than I thought._ "Though most of the other handmaidens aren't as hot-tempered as I."

"I'm sure you don't get excited without a good reason," he murmured. He bent to kiss her neck. She swallowed hard.

"Um," she said, totally at a loss for words. He looked down at her, eyes filled with concern._

"My goodness, darling," Palpatine murmured. "Your eyes are absolutely huge. You look like some helpless little wild creature caught in a snare." _Oh great, _she thought. _I know SabÃ© wouldn't look like that. If he were holding HER, she'd be a wild creature all right, but not like he's describing._

"I guess I'm still a little tense from that meeting today," she said

lamely. Palpatine's voicephone rang. And rang. And rangâ€| "Aren't you going to answer that?"

"No, I thought I'd let the message center get it."

"Oh, I think you'd better answer it," PadmÃ© said, grateful for the excuse to move out of his arms. "It might be important." He shrugged and picked it up.

"Helloâ€| Yes, of course it's me, who else would it be? Oh? Yes, I did notice thatâ€|. what do you think is going on? Mmmmmâ€| do you think? Well. Yes, that could be an effective strategy, but I'm concerned about the long-term effectsâ€|. How far are you prepared to go? My goodness, that far. Well, I'm notâ€|. no, you must understand that the situation is different for meâ€| What? You'd bloody well better not! Well then I will too! No I'm not bluffing! Right! Well, that's all there is to say then, isn't it?" He hung up.

"What was that about?" PadmÃ© asked. Palpatine sighed.

"The usual squabbling between petty paper pushers with nothing better to do with their time than harass me when I'm otherwise engaged. Now where were we? Oh yes, you were telling me that you're still tense from your meeting today." He took her hand and led her to the sofa, where he sat and drew her down next to him. "Why don't you just lie down here with me on this sofa and I'll see what I can do to help you relax, hmm?"

Anakin returned to the table with another pitcher of Guinness. SabÃ© couldn't believe it. She had never seen one person consume such a large amount of beer in such a small amount of time. If I drank like he does, I'd be hung over for a month, she thought. And how does PadmÃ© tolerate this? They've been sitting here all night, drinking and talking about life at the Jedi Temple. It's enough to drive a person mad.

"Mmmmm, not funny is it to call the Temple from a cell voicephone and ask if our refrigeration unit is running!" Anakin mimicked, sending both Jedi into fits of laughter.

"My turn," Obi-Wan said. "Not funny is it to fill out subscription cards for dirty magazines for Master Windu!"

"Not funny is it to teach the Padawans how to give people a hot foot!" Anakin supplied. SabÃ© wondered if she would be forfeiting the bet if she left early. She feared her sanity might depend on making an immediate departure. Finally, she couldn't bear it any longer.

"Not funny is it to sit around all night talking about this stuff when you're supposed to be on a date with your girlfriend!" she snapped.

"What's wrong?" Anakin asked.

"What's wrong? Are you seriously asking me that question?"

"Wellâ€| erâ€| yeah," Anakin replied. SabÃ©'s famous temper finally reached the boiling point.

"I'll tell you what's wrong," she said, rising to her feet. "I've been sitting her for hours listening to you two brainless twits repeat the same lame stories back to each other, and I'm getting damn sick of it!"

"I thought you said you really like hearing about what goes on at the Jedi Temple," Obi-Wan said, puzzled.

"Well obviously that was before tonight." In the back of her mind, SabÃ© realized she had probably blown it with her outburst. After all, PadmÃ© would never have exploded like that. In fact, she would never have gotten tired of their stupid stories in the first place. She sighed.

"All right, take it easy," Anakin said. "We'll just finish this pitcher and go back to your hotel room."

"Fine," SabÃ© said, relieved that the two Jedi were evidently too drunk to notice her odd (for PadmÃ©) behavior. Then she realized that she'd just agreed to take Anakin back to the hotel with her. I'll just tell him no, she resolved. I don't have to give a reason. A woman is entitled to refuse if she wishes, no matter who is asking. I'm sure Amidala will be doing plenty of refusing herself this evening.

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"Oh yes," PadmÃ© gasped. "Yes! That feels SOOOO good! No, don't stop! Please! Oh gods! Oh don't stop!"

"But my hand is cramping up," Palpatine complained. She groaned in protest, then sat up and stretched luxuriously.

"That has GOT to be the best back rub I've ever had in my life," she said. "Thank you SO much!" He smiled.

"You're quite welcome," he said, rubbing his hand.

"Here, let me see it," PadmÃ© said. "One good rub deserves another." She took his hand and began massaging the cramped muscle.

"You certainly seem more relaxed than you were when you got here," he observed. She smiled.

"You could relax durasteel with those hands," she said. "Incredible!" He smiled modestly.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it." Her stomach growled loudly. They both laughed. "So dinner is next, is it?"

"Yeah, that would be great," she said, following him to the kitchen.

"I haven't made anything really special," he said apologetically. "I hope you don't mind. I simply wasn't expecting you to be dressed so grandly. We could move into the dining room if you like." She smiled.

"No, this is fine."

"Actually," he confessed as he set a plate before her. "I didn't spend all day slaving over a hot cooker. I'm afraid the credit for this feast belongs to my cook, not me. I would only serve you something I'd cooked myself if I didn't like you very much." She laughed.

"Don't worry, I'm hopeless in a kitchen myself." She took a sip of the cold white wine he'd poured for her.

"You know, when I was first elected Senator, I ended up being selected to host a reception for the Twi'lek delegation. Well, naturally no one thought to tell me about their particular dietary requirementsâ€|" Soon, PadmÃ© was laughing helplessly at his accounts of various inauspicious encounters with alien cuisine. She in turn shared with him several hilarious mishaps involving food and alien races that had not been at all funny at the time. They ate a lot, drank a lot, and laughed a lot that evening. PadmÃ© wondered if SabÃ© were having as good a time with Anakin as she was with Palpatine.

SabÃ© punched in the code that opened PadmÃ©'s hotel room, dismissed the two handmaidens with a silent gesture, and led Anakin inside. The door slid shut behind them.

"Well," she said. "Here we are."

"Don't you want to slip into something more comfortable?" SabÃ© frowned to herself. _He talks like an actor out of a bad holovid, she thought. What on Naboo does PadmÃ© see in this twit, anyway?_

"What, you don't like this gown? I'll have you know it cost a fortune," she said. Anakin shrugged.

"All your gowns look exactly the same to me when they're in a crumpled pile on the floor." Against her will, SabÃ© giggled at that. He walked over to her and took her in his arms. "First time I've heard you laugh at something I've said all night," he said quietly. He bent his head to kiss her lips. It was a long, slow, thorough kiss. Without realizing she'd done it, she put her arms around his neck. As he kissed her, he ran his hands up the sides of her body. She shivered. Delicious shivers. Now his hands were at the front of her gown and though she knew she should stop him, she made no move to do so. Instead, she pulled him closer. He moved his hands to her back and fumbled for the fastenings to her gown.

"No," she protested. His hands moved down her body again. She felt him lifting her skirts. "What are you doing?"

"I thought you wanted to leave your gown on," he replied. "That's fine with me. Could be fun." Before she could protest, he wound an arm around her waist, drew her against him and kissed her again, using his free hand to haul her skirts higher.

"No, Anakin." She removed her skirts from his hand and pulled away from him.

"What's wrong, PadmÃ©?" he asked. "You haven't been yourself all night." _You have NO idea_, SabÃ© thought ironically. "You can't still be tense from that meeting after all the beer you drank at

Liam's." She shrugged. "I know what you need," he said.

"What?"

"Another drink," he replied. She sighed.

"Anakin, to tell you the truth, I think what I really need most right now is my bed."

"Cool," he said. He began loosening his tunic. She shook her head.

"Listen, I don't think you're getting the picture here. I need to get some SLEEP." His face fell.

"Oh," he said. "Well, OK. I guess I'll see you tomorrow night at Liam's."

"I'll be there," she told him. She walked over to where he stood, his head bent dejectedly.

"Are you OK?" she asked him. He looked at her and smiled.

"I've really missed you, PadmÃ©. I was looking forward to tonight." Her heart sank. She felt bad for him, really she did. She just wasn't prepared to sleep with him to prove it. Anyway, she doubted neither he nor PadmÃ© would appreciate such a gesture on her part, no matter how well intended.

"Oh, Anakin," she said sadly. "There will be other nights. Just not tonight, OK?" He sighed.

"OK." He turned to go.

"Wait," she said. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him thoroughly, then removed a small white lace handkerchief from the sleeve of her gown and wiped her make-up off his face. As she worked, she spoke. "Now you have something to dream about tonight. It will make tomorrow night even sweeter. Anticipation adds spice to the dish."

"Culinary metaphors from the lovely Queen of the Naboo," Anakin said wryly. SabÃ© laughed.

"Good night, Anakin." She watched the door slide shut behind him. "I did it," she said quietly. She broke into a huge smile. "I did it!"

PadmÃ© woke when Palpatine switched off the holovid. He had his arm around her, and she had been sleeping with her head on his shoulder.

"I apologize for falling asleep like that," she said, yawning.

"Coruscant News Network always puts me to sleep, too," he told her mildly. "Anyway, you've had quite a busy day, haven't you?" She smiled.

"You have no idea," she told him. He patted her knee reassuringly.

"It's all right, you can relax now," he said soothingly. _That's what YOU think_, she thought, suddenly very conscious of his arm around her shoulders. _SabÃ© would never even think of refusing him. It's going to take all my wits to stay out of his bed without arousing suspicionâ€¦ or anything else._ He touched her cheek gently.

"You're going to mess up my make-up," she chided. He shrugged.

"Hmm, oh well," he said quietly. He leaned over to kiss her, and this time it was not anything that she could have described as "lame". When she finally opened her eyes, she realized she had fallen backwards onto the sofa, with Palpatine lying half on top of her. _This is not good,_ she thought. _How am I going to get out of this? Even worse, do I really WANT to get out of this?_ Suddenly, she remembered her cell voicephone. She wound one arm around his neck and pulled him down to kiss him while she used her free hand to search her pocket for her voicephone. She found it and hit the "self test" button, producing a rewarding little buzz that sounded quite loud in the large, silent living room. She pulled the voicephone out of her pocket.

"Sorry," she said breathlessly, holding the voicephone up for him to see. "The Queen is calling me."

"Is she?" he asked. "Well, do what you did last time this happened," he said, taking the voicephone out of her hand. "Remember?" He switched the voicephone off and tossed it onto a nearby chair. "You said she'd get over it." _She ignored her voicephone when she was with Palpatine? That horny little bitch_, PadmÃ© thought, amused.

"I can't do that again," she said, worming her way out from under him and standing. "She got really mad." She rolled her eyes. "The gods only know what this might be about. Maybe she had a stupid spat with Anakin or something." He sat up, took her hand and drew her down to sit on his lap.

"I wish you wouldn't go," he said quietly. _And I wish I weren't tempted to stay!_ PadmÃ© thought.

"I'll come back with you tomorrow night, after Liam's Lounge," she murmured into his hair. _Well, SabÃ© will, anyway_, she thought. "But I have to go tonight. The Queen will be cross." _And I simply cannot share your bed, no matter how promising your kisses are._ _Besides, it might be good for that weird relationship of yours if "SabÃ©" plays hard to get for a change_. She gave him one last kiss before rising to leave. Being a gentleman, he escorted her to the door.

"Until tomorrow night, then," he said, bringing her hand to his lips to kiss it.

"Tomorrow night. I promise," she said, smiling. She stepped out into the hallway and heard the door slide shut behind her. _I did it_, she thought ecstatically. "I did it!" she said triumphantly.

"I can't believe we did it," SabÃ© said, taking a sip of wine.

"I know," PadmÃ© agreed. "Palpatine didn't suspect a thing."

"Neither did Anakin. I guess we're both pretty good decoys."

"Or they're just not very observant," PadmÃ© suggested. They both laughed. They were sitting in a booth at the back of Liam's Lounge waiting for the men to join them. "Here they come," she told SabÃ©. "Now don't say anything."

"Are you kidding? It'll be our secret."

"Hello, ladies," Anakin said, sitting next to SabÃ© and putting his arm around her.

"So nice to see you again, Your Majesty," Palpatine told her as he slid into the booth next to her. The Queen and her handmaiden exchanged glances.

"What's up with this, guys?" PadmÃ© asked.

"Well, we figured you two had so much fun last night that you'd want to make this a permanent arrangement," Anakin told her.

"How did â€œ " SabÃ© began.

"When did â€œ " PadmÃ© began. The men laughed.

"My dear," Palpatine said, turning towards PadmÃ©, "I knew you weren't SabÃ© the moment I opened the door. Honestly, did you really think a pretty frock and coat of paint on your face would fool me?"

"Yep," Anakin told SabÃ©. "I knew you weren't PadmÃ© the second I sat down next to you."

"But you let us think â€œ " PadmÃ© began. "I very nearlyâ€œ oh my." She felt the blush creep up her face.

"What's this, dear?" Anakin asked curiously.

"Never mind," PadmÃ© mumbled, ducking her head.

"You have no room to get angry at her," SabÃ© said to Anakin. "You KNEW I wasn't PadmÃ© and you touched my â€œ "

"Um, well let's just forget about that, OK?" Anakin interrupted.

"You did what?" PadmÃ© demanded. Anakin smiled sheepishly.

"Anyway," Anakin said, "I wondered what was going on, so I called Palpatine to see if PadmÃ© was there with him. Of course he told me she was, so we decided to go along with your little game to see how far YOU would take it."

"That was the call you insisted I take," Palpatine told PadmÃ©.

"You bastards," SabÃ© said quietly, but she was smiling. PadmÃ© smiled and shook her head admiringly.

"So what on Naboo possessed you two to switch places last night?" Palpatine asked. PadmÃ© shrugged.

"We started talking about how well SabÃ© is able to impersonate me," she told him. "Then I wondered if I could do as well pretending to be her. Then we ended up making a bet on it."

"Who won?" Anakin asked.

"I think you and Palpatine won," SabÃ© said acidly.

"You know," Palpatine said slowly. "Her Majesty made certain promises to me on your behalf last night.'

"Yeah," Anakin agreed. "I seem to remember hearing some promises too." PadmÃ© shrugged and raised her eyebrows.

"We shall see," she said.

FINIS.

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file.